



PHOTOGRAPHY/ BRUCE HILLS

Pony Express statue in Sacramento, Calif., marks end of a 1,966-mile trip from St. Joseph, Mo. The route from Salt Lake City, if you can still find it after all the years, is 760 miles.

# You go thataway — er, maybe it's thisaway . . .

■ **Fourth in a series**

**By Bruce Hills**  
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The only way we know to find your  
way along the Pony Express trail in



Floyd, states, "Billy was not destined  
to grow any older."

"On his last run, he was waylaid by  
a war party of about a dozen Ban-  
nocks and Utes. Turning loose his  
pony, with Indian arrows in its hide  
to warn the next station, Billy hid

Sacramento

California is to know someone who lives there, and the best person to know is the president of the California Pony Express Association, Ron Fitzmeyer, of Pollock Pines, Calif.

Fitzmeyer and his organization have researched the Pony Express trail through their state, and Fitzmeyer says he hopes they can publish a guide book soon.

I hope so. Steve Banks and I, traveling by pickup truck over the Pony Express route west from Salt Lake City, found no printed trail guides or books describing the Pony Express trail in California.

The state has not printed any, even though the Pony Express route ends in Sacramento.

I talked to Fitzmeyer over the phone from Stateline, Nev., and he furnished me with a step-by-step mile-by-mile route to Sacramento through 13 Pony Express stations. Many of these stations have different names than the stations listed on maps in old books about the Pony Express, but markers in the cities along the route prove the accuracy of Fitzmeyer's instructions.

There are only a few places where the route does not follow a paved road, so driving over the trail is simple — if you know where to go.

Not one sign was posted to help Steve and me in California, and no amount of telephone instruction will excel someone leading you around by the nose. Since nobody was around to pull my nose, I managed to get lost a few times negotiating the route to Sacramento.

The countryside is beautiful, however, and the few times we wandered off the trail proved interesting.

From Yanks Station in Meyers, the trail winds through Strawberry, a resort community along the American River where N. Neklason, manager of the Strawberry Iced Cream Co., sells milkshakes for \$2.40. The road continues past Websters (not even a city now and only a monument beside the road), to Sportsman's Hall in Pollock Pines and then to Camino (where we could find no monument).

From Camino, Steve and I drove through a forest on a narrow road

## PONY EXPRESS

shaded by towering trees that made a bower over the road. We passed apple orchards and wine groves on manicured hillsides and a winery beside the road. Soon we arrived in Placerville, where a bronze plaque commemorates the bravery of Snowshoe Thompson, who was "a lifeline between the Utah Territory across the Sierras and the new state of California from 1856 to 1876."

From Placerville, the trail goes through Diamond Springs, El Dorado, Shingle Springs and Rescue, and past Pleasant Grove House on the Dixon Ranch to Folsom, where the famous prison stands and where a picturesque old-town Folsom has been constructed.

In this part of Folsom stands the Wells Fargo & Co. Assay Office. A large plaque on the side of the building tells Folsom's part in the Pony Express adventure.

From Folsom, the Pony Express travels through Rancho Cordova and the Mills Station there, to Sacramento, the end of the Pony Express trail, where a large statue of a Pony Express rider and his mount has been erected.

Sacramento has built an old town in its midst, with board sidewalks and frame storefronts, reminiscent of the 1860s. The statue of the Pony Express rider stands inside this old town.

Steve remarked how "skinny the express rider looks." The sculptor made his work true to life. The riders were small and wiry and were hired for their lack of weight.

The advertisements in newspapers in the early months of 1860 asked for "young, skinny wiry fellows not over 18. Must be expert riders willing to risk death daily. Orphans preferred. Wages \$25 per week."

One of the youngest riders was Billy Tate, 14, who rode between Carson City and Camp Ruby in Nevada. As the book "Phantom Riders of the Pony Express," by William H.

behind a huge boulder and prepared to fight the Indians and defend the mail.

"When the nearby stationmasters came to look for him, they found seven dead Indians and Billy's arrow-riddled body."

The Indians had respected the young man's courage. They had not touched the leather mochila containing the mail and they had not taken his scalp.

There were a host of other riders whose bravery and skill made them legends in their time. Buffalo Bill — William C. Cody — was only one of them. He once covered a total distance of 322 miles in 21 hours and 40 minutes using 21 horses.

Robert Haslam, known as Pony Bob, once rode 380 miles in 36 hours — one of the longest and fastest rides in Pony Express history.

Steve and I looked at the mileage indicator in Sacramento. Subtracting the many miles we drove on wild goose chases and wrong turns, we figure our route over the Pony Express trail from Salt Lake City to Sacramento covers 760 miles.

We had left Salt Lake City at 7 a.m. Wednesday and arrived in Sacramento at 7 p.m. Friday.

You can pick your own way back. We took I-80 from Reno through Elko because we wanted to see the reconstructed Ruby Valley Pony Express station that now stands in front of a museum in Elko. We made several side trip on the way back, traveling south from I-80 to see the country just north of the Pony Express route.

It is a beautiful, wide-open land that is seldom traveled or explored. We met Paul Crane, a gold prospector and miner who lives near Battle Mountain, and heard him tell about some modern adventures he has had. He said he has traveled the Pony Express trail in spots, but he said farmers have plowed up the trail so badly in some areas of eastern and central Nevada that he could not follow it.

"I don't know why they have put barbed wire fences across the road, as they have done. How can they think they own the Pony Express route?"

Next: A future for the trail?